

operationjulie
getting behind the UK's biggest LSD operation

94 York Street, London, W1 – Charles Druce

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(<http://operationjulie.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/94yorkst1.jpg>)

94 York Street – former premises of Charles Druce Ltd



(<http://operationjulie.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/94yorkst21.jpg>)

The former hallowed portals...where Richard Kemp visited to pick up a spectrometer.

English supplier of LSD to Timothy Leary and the Brotherhood of Eternal Love

Charles Druce is an unlikely figure in the history of LSD. He started his career as a clerk in various chemical merchants' offices in London, moving up to trading in mail-order LSD in the early to mid-1960s when it was still legal. LSD was being legitimately produced in Czechoslovakia for example, even after Sandoz in Switzerland got cold feet and stopped its own production.

Druce came to the attention of Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert (now Baba Ram Dass), former Harvard professors who set up a legendary psychedelic community in Millbrook, upper New York State. Druce supplied LSD to Leary and Alpert up to around 1966. Alpert would fly over and stay in luxury hotels and pick up the acid in person to take back to the States. The full account of Alpert's involvement has never been told, and probably won't ever be, but he had a dare-devil streak that involved for example on one occasion flying his own plane (a Cessna 172) from Canada to the US high on acid as the last part of his journey. Building a close relationship with Druce, Alpert once presented Druce with a copy of the 'Psychedelic Experience', the book he co-authored with Timothy Leary and Ralph Metzner.

In late 1966, LSD was banned in America and shortly after in the UK. Tim Scully and Nick Sand, chemists associated with Millbrook and the legendary Owsley Stanley in the US, went underground to produce it. Druce – by now owner of Charles Druce Ltd – was approached by Scully and Sand to supply raw materials. Druce and a colleague, Ronald Craze, created a company – Alban Feeds – to supply Scully and Sand with Ergotamine Tartrate. The first shipment was 2.8 kilos – enough to make around 5.6 million doses of acid.

This arrangement worked well for over a year. Druce also provided specialised equipment, including a spectrometer for Richard Kemp who was by now working with Ronald Stark in France. In his statement to the police following the Operation Julie bust, Kemp recalled going to Druce's offices near Baker Street to pick up the equipment (in Ronald Stark's red ferrari).

But in 1970, living well on substantial advance payments from the US, Druce and Craze were failing to keep the shipments going. The US operation had been busted in Denver, and Alban Feed's role in supplying raw materials had come to the attention of the police in both the US and the UK. Druce and Craze cooled their involvement with the US.

By this time, Ronald Stark had become involved in the US operation and brought his more direct approach into play. He knew that Druce and Craze had been stockpiling ergotamine tartrate and keeping it in Hamburg – the international trading centre for chemicals. He set a trap in place. In due course, tempted by an offer from a Swiss Company, Inland Alkaloids, Druce and Craze entered into a transaction to sell 9 kilos of Ergotamine Tartrate. But Inland Alkaloids was a 'front' company, operated at arm's length by Nick Sand and Ronald Stark, and Druce and Craze found themselves ripped off and in debt to the bank (the Nat West at Crystal Palace).

The 9 kilos of Ergotamine Tartrate went to France where Richard Kemp was by then working with Ron Stark to produce huge quantities of acid.

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